Deconstructing Libertarian Myths About Press Freedom[1]

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The Nordic countries enjoy top positions in the international rankings of press freedom. Although the criteria used in these rankings are open to methodological as well as political criticism, they nevertheless accord the Nordic countries a prestigious status. Freedom House[2] gives Finland, Norway and Sweden the highest score, while Reporters Without Borders[3] ranks Finland number 1 with the rest of the Nordic countries all among the top 10, clearly surpassing such countries as the USA and the UK.

These rankings tend to support – especially among those at the top – an uncritical approach to the concept of freedom in general and freedom of the media in particular. This is unfortunate, because freedom is more than a concept, especially in the professional and academic circles of journalism. Freedom constitutes a paradigm guiding our ways of thinking about media and society. Moreover, in our Western tradition, the paradigm of freedom is often quite problematic and even biased because it tends to alienate us from ethics by suggesting that values are something that intervene in a natural state of freedom – that values are obstacles to freedom. This situation calls for critical excursions into the concept and paradigm of freedom.

We begin the deconstruction of libertarian myths by reviewing three landmark documents of the international community adopted at the United Nations (UN) and codifying the media-related freedom as a universal concept. The latest is the Millennium Declaration of 2000, while the other two are from the 1940s: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the Constitution of UNESCO of 1945. These documents introduce an idea of media freedom that is quite balanced and far from the ultra-libertarian version conventionally advocated especially by Western media proprietors – namely, that freedom in this field means absence of state control, including legal regulation other than safeguards against censorship. Indeed, international law does not support a simple notion of negative freedom (freedom *from*); what is suggested instead is a notion of positive freedom (freedom *for*), whereby freedom is not an end

product to be protected as such but a means to ensure other more general objectives such as peace and democracy.

We then proceed to examine the doctrine of a free marketplace of ideas, whereby a free flow of information and ideas will automatically ensure that truth will prevail, notably through a mechanism of self-correcting truth. This doctrine was shaped in 20th-century America, first in legal and political debates between the two World Wars and finally during the Cold War in the 1950s. Meanwhile, going back to the classics of liberal thought, particularly to John Milton's (1644) *Areopagitica* and John Stuart Mill's (1859) *On Liberty*, it turns out that their thinking does not exactly correspond to the later doctrine. Hence, it is a myth to take the free marketplace of ideas as part and parcel of original liberalism.[4]

We conclude by exposing the paradigm of freedom against the notion of power as understood in philosophical traditions. This suggests that narrow-minded advocates of Western freedom are equally fundamentalist as those Islamists who are typically named as such. The lesson is a call for continuous deconstruction of the freedom paradigm.

Millennium Declaration

A largely overlooked paragraph in the Millennium Declaration of September 18, 2000, resolves under Chapter V. Human rights, democracy and good governance:

> To ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information.[5]

Here we have an authoritative document of the international community – although just a Declaration, not a text of proper international law – that speaks literally about the freedom of the media. But how? It is not an abstract freedom granted to the media but a call or even an obligation to perform a certain role in society and to assist people to gain access to information. It is a concept of positive freedom to perform a certain role – not a negative freedom from restraint to do whatever the media may want to do. The parameters for the "essential role" are not specified in the same paragraph, but the Millennium Declaration leaves little doubt about what is meant given the preceding four chapters: I. Values and principles, II. Peace, security and disarmament, III. Development and poverty eradication, IV. Protecting our common environment.

This message is unanimously given in the name of all countries. It stands as a universal political opinion of the international community – a concept of media freedom in the post-Cold War world.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The famous Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.[6]

The subject of the right here is "everyone" in the sense of "all human beings" (the phrase used in Article 1). Beyond everyone appears only "a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized", as stipulated in Article 28 (introducing the concept of "international order", which later in the NWICO debate was rejected by the Western press freedom advocates). Nothing in Article 19 suggests that the institution of the press has any ownership right to this freedom. The word "media" appears as an open means for the use of "everyone" to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas.

In fact, Article 19 stipulates that media should be in the service, if not the ownership, of the people. It is a myth that the press and media as an institution enjoys protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this respect, some human rights lobbies, including that bearing the name of Article 19, have pursued doubtful policies in favour of media proprietors instead of individual people.

Pedantically speaking, Article 19 introduces the right of "freedom of opinion and expression", not "freedom of information" or "free flow of information", let alone "press freedom". Moreover, it is important to remember that the Universal Declaration of 1948 does not constitute proper international law; this is done only by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted 18 years later. And document adds to the definition of the Declaration's Article 19 provision the exercise of this right "carries with it special duties and responsibilities" and may be subject to certain restrictions under specific circumstances to be provided by law.

Accordingly, the legal form of what is referred to as "press freedom" includes a concept of freedom that is far from the unconditional license to do anything, as is typically suggested by media proprietors and also many journalists. Hence the concept of freedom under human rights turns out to be quite qualified and leads us to be wary of the conventional myth.

Actually, all this is an old lesson that has largely been forgotten. It is important to relearn this lesson, with teaching materials such as those provided by Nordenstreng and Schiller in 1979 (Part 3 with chapters by Eek, Gross, and Whitton), Nordenstreng in 1984 (Part 2 on international law and the mass

media), and Hamelink in 1994. Moreover, here is a challenge for journalism educators to prepare an easy-to-read and up-to-date presentation of the true idea of freedom within the context of international law and politics.

Constitution of UNESCO

UNESCO presents itself nowadays typically as a defender of freedom – not least press freedom. Its website introduces the relevant sector as follows:

> The Communication and Information Sector (CI) was established in its present form in 1990. Its programmes are rooted in UNESCO's Constitution, which requires the Organization to promote "free flow of ideas by word and image".[7]

This is a misleading formulation which not only celebrates freedom but disregards its conceptual and philosophical foundation. Let us read carefully what UNESCO's Constitution says about the promotion of "free flow of information by word and image":

> 1. The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.
>
> 2. To realize this purpose the Organization will: (a) Collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication and to that end recommend such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image…[8]

Here, the free flow of ideas is supposed to serve the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples (Article 2(a)), which for its part is subjected to the overriding purpose of contributing to peace and security (Article 1). Thus, UNESCO's constitutional mission is not to promote the free flow as such – as a simple and isolated aspect – but to do it to the end of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of people for the higher cause of peace and security. Moreover, Article 2 (a) specifies that UNESCO's promotion of the free flow should take place by means of collaboration and through international agreements. It is also noteworthy that Article 1 determines UNESCO's overall mandate to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for human rights and fundamental freedoms as affirmed by the UN Charter.

The conceptual structure of the constitutional stipulation is quite clear, with the mandate to promote free flow placed in the third level below (a) peace and security and (b) mutual knowledge and understanding of people. The reference to human rights and fundamental freedoms in Article 1 does not provide an unconditional license for free flow but rather ties UNESCO's mandate to the general principles of international law as laid down in the UN Charter. In fact, here we have a textbook example of the notion of positive freedom – free flow serving other objectives (freedom *for*) instead of being an end of itself as the notion of negative freedom is understood (freedom *from*).

Reading UNESCO's contemporary presentations of itself in the CI sector leads one to wonder whether the Constitution has been forgotten since 1990 – the end of the Cold War. To put it more bluntly, UNESCO seems to have departed from its legitimate constitutional mandate by elevating freedom of information as a top priority with a self-serving objective. For example, under the theme Freedom of Expression, the text reads: "UNESCO promotes freedom of expression and freedom of the press as a basic human right…." Here and elsewhere, "press" has appeared as the subject of freedom without it being mentioned anywhere in the Constitution or other proper sources of international law.

To be fair to contemporary UNESCO, one should concede that the banner on the main website says: "Building peace in the minds of men and women."[9] Moreover, the blame for misleading formulations goes not only to the Secretariat headed by the Director-General but ultimately to the Member States under whose guidance the organization operates.

It is not difficult to find an explanation for UNESCO's departure from its constitutional line. It wanted to get rid of its reputation as a fellow traveler of the socialist and authoritarian regimes that had developed in the West along with an anti-imperialist drive in the 1970s. This drive had given rise to such concepts as New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) as well as to such achievements as the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (MacBride et al. 1980). By adopting freedom as a leading theme, especially in the media field, UNESCO draws a dividing line at the world before 1990 – with its division into three worlds, including the socialist bloc of the East and the Non-Aligned Movement of the South. Entering a new millennium UNESCO presents itself as purified from the burdens of the past. Psychologically, this may be understandable as treatment of a trauma, but it is fatally wrong in terms of UNESCO's constitutional status and role in international politics. By wrapping its IC sector in a freedom banner, UNESCO has dissociated itself from its basic mandate and supported the myth that its mission is unconditional free flow. To use an old metaphor: The baby has gone out with the bath water.

To understand what has happened at UNESCO, one needs to recall the history of the anti-imperialist drive of the 1970s. It was part and parcel of a more fundamental development in the global arena with landmarks such as the UN resolutions on a New International Economic Order and equating Zionism with racism. During this radical period in international politics, UNESCO made history by producing the Mass Media Declaration and the MacBride Report and setting up the International Programme for the Development of Communication. It is remarkable that all this was done by diplomatic consensus, although the "great media debate" in the 1970s went through war-like stages of a "decolonization offensive" and a "Western counterattack" before reaching a "truce" (Mansell & Nordenstreng 2006).

What followed after these stages is crucial to understand UNESCO's traumatic relationship to freedom of information. Ronald Reagan's advent as president in early 1981 turned the United States from multilateralism to a unilateral employment of power politics, with a relative weakening of the USSR and the Non-Aligned Movement. The truce of the late 1970s was followed by a new Western offensive in the 1980s. At this stage, all the elements of compromise that were earlier regarded as valuable and honorable went suddenly out of fashion and even turned into liability risks, such as NWICO (Nordenstreng 2012).

In a still broader historical context, UNESCO's current approach to the free flow of information means a return to what Americans had been forging to push onto its agenda since its foundation in 1945 and that largely figured in its communication policies in the 1950s and 1960s – regardless of what the Constitution said. As Herbert Schiller (1976) has shown, the American doctrine of free flow of information has an ironic prehistory between the two World Wars when Associated Press (AP) used it as an argument in encroaching the territories of British and French news agencies Reuters and Havas. Referring to American expansionism, the British *Economist* noted that Kent Cooper, the executive manager of AP, "like most big business executives, experiences a peculiar moral glow in finding that his idea of freedom coincides with his commercial advantage" (Schiller 1976: 29). In the early 1940s, the American Society of Newspaper Editors proposed to the U.S. Congress that it support "world freedom of information and unrestricted communications of news throughout the world" (ibid: 31). This lobbying was successful to the point that John Foster Dulles, one of the chief architects of the American Cold War policy after 1945, declared: "If I were to be granted one point in foreign policy and no other, I would make it the free flow of information" (ibid: 30).

Despite the initial hesitancy among the European allies, the doctrine of free flow of information became indeed a central element in the common Western arsenal of the Cold War. It found its way also to UNESCO, although, as shown by Joseph Mehan (1981), Americans did not succeed in totally turning the

organization into an instrument of the Cold War. A muted but still noticeable line in keeping with the Western free flow doctrine continued until the 1970s, when it was challenged by the anti-imperialist drive. Schiller wrote his disarming historical review at this time in the mid-1970s, suggesting that the American hegemony was on the decline, giving way to a more balanced notion of free flow, whereby the developing world would also have its fair share. Today, we can say that Schiller was wrong and American domination is back again.

The lesson from this history is, first, that free flow of information has never been a neutral and ecumenical concept but rather a tactical argument in socioeconomic and ideological struggles. Second, the constitutional mission of UNESCO, based on a text drafted in the idealistic spirit toward the end of World War II, was contradictory to the free flow doctrine created in the United States and turned into a Cold War instrument. Third, by following the free flow doctrine, UNESCO deviated from its constitutional mission until the 1970s, when the Mass Media Declaration, the MacBride Commission, and NWICO brought it back on track. As we know, this turn back to basics was only short lived and was derailed by political shifts in the world since the 1980s.

Legacy of Liberalism

Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) summarize libertarian theory in *Four Theories of the Press* as follows:

> The libertarian theory of the function of the mass media in a democratic society has had a long and arduous history. This history has paralleled the development of democratic principles in government and free enterprise in economics. The theory itself can trace a respected lineage among the philosophers of ancient times, but it received its greatest impetus from the developments in western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From Milton to Holmes it has stressed the superiority of the principle of individual freedom and judgement and the axiom that truth when allowed free rein will emerge victorious from any encounter. Its slogans have been the "self-righting process" and the "free market place of ideas." It has been an integral part of the great march of democracy which has resulted in the stupendous advancement of the well-being of humanity. It has been the guiding principle of western civilization for more than two hundred years. (p. 70)

This text more than anything else has fueled the myth that the idea of a free marketplace of ideas with its mechanism of self-righting truth belongs to the

core of liberalism based on Milton and Mill. The *Four Theories of the Press* became a baseline for thinking about the media systems in the world as it filled a gap in textbooks on journalism and mass communication. However, its huge popularity was not substantiated by a corresponding weight in scholarship, as shown by *Last Rights* (Nerone 1995), which critically revisited the *Four Theories of the Press* – both coming from the same College of Communications at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

In point of fact, the doctrine of a free marketplace of ideas with a self-righting truth, as it keeps circulating in contemporary professional and academic discourse, cannot be found in the works of Milton and Mill. Although these classics of liberalism used the market metaphor, it was not understood as an appropriate way for individuals to approach the world of ideas. Actually, both were aghast at the prospect of ideas being treated as if they were goods to be bought and sold in a market. They surely advocated freedom of thought and speech without prior censorship, but the concept of a free marketplace of ideas had no strategic place in their thinking. They also recognized the power of truth over a candid mind but only under fair circumstances – something not necessarily guaranteed by the media marketplace.

The following two sentences from Milton's pamphlet *Areopagitica* are usually quoted as proof that he is the father of the concept of self-correcting truth:

> And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter? (Altschull 1990: 40)

Milton's main point was to oppose the licensing and censorship of printing. He insisted that all kinds of views should be allowed to be brought to the public and allowed to clash without hindrance. His philosophical view would nowadays be called a maxim of pluralism, whereby we would not find the truth without also encountering falsehood. Milton was passionately opposed to forbidding anything to be published, comparing censorship to murder: "He who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God." In his main work, *Paradise Lost*, Milton (1667) elaborated the struggle between truth and falsehood and made a fervent appeal to challenge official truths, including God's commandments, with an invitation even to commit sins as a means to acquire knowledge and achieve human growth and development.

Accordingly, truth will not automatically prevail but must be cultivated in an active and radical process. This view is simply incompatible with the concept of self-righting truth. In short, Milton cannot be taken as an early advocate of

market liberalism: "Call him radical, call him puritan, call him republican, but do not call him (neo)liberal" (Peters 2005, p. 72).

The myth about Milton as a source of the doctrine of a free marketplace of ideas and self-righting truth began to emerge in the trial of Thomas Paine *in absentia* held in the late 18th century. Paine, author of *The Rights of Man* (1791) and activist in both the American and French revolutions, was accused in Britain of inciting revolution in his native country, whose elite was furious about the revolutionary ideas. Paine's defense lawyer, Thomas Erskine, used Milton's *Areopagitica* to prove that no good government needed to be afraid of open discussion. In his argumentation, Erskine twisted Milton's point toward the concept of self-righting truth. This argument availed nothing in the proceedings against Paine, but it brought about an erroneous version of Milton's thinking (Keane 1991).

John Stuart Mill, who had minutely scrutinized what Milton had written two centuries earlier, shared the position about the free encounter of ideas and the inadmissibility of censorship. His *On Liberty* is a fine elaboration of the same theme, but it does not include the doctrine of a free marketplace of ideas. The rest of Mill's production is likewise void in this respect. For a liberal, he was far from dogmatic about the role of the state, considering that state intervention may well be necessary in ensuring social justice and other higher values. Also, the freedom of opinion and its expression was not for Mill an end in itself; he viewed it as "the necessity to the mental well-being of mankind (on which all their other well-being depends)", as he expressed the ultimate objective in his summary of the grounds for pursuing this freedom.

As to the concept of self-righting truth, Mill actually held a contrary view, whereby it was quite possible that truth failed to prevail in a free encounter and falsehood became a dominant public opinion. In *On Liberty*, he dismissed the concept of self-righting truth as "pleasant falsehood". Later Mill had bitter personal experience of how falsehood may prevail: With his wife, Harriet Taylor-Mill, he fought for women's emancipation but failed to gain broader support and even became an object of ridicule, finally losing his seat in Parliament.

Consequently, it is a myth that the standard justification for press freedom by the doctrine of free marketplace of ideas comes from the classics of liberalism. Milton and Mill do not provide direct support for contemporary neoliberalism and cannot be taken as the basis for a libertarian theory of the press. The legacy of original liberalism represents rather social democracy and corresponds to a social responsibility theory of the press proposed by the Hutchins Commission in the United States (*A Free and Responsible Press* 1947). The concept of freedom in the original liberal philosophy was positive rather than negative: freedom *for* something, not freedom *from* something.

Where, then, are the roots of the doctrine of a free marketplace of ideas apart from the trial of Thomas Paine in the 1790s? An often-quoted source in the literature is the proceedings in 1919 against Russian emigrants in New York accused of distributing anti-American leaflets (supporting the socialist revolution of 1917). In this process, Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes referred to "free trade in ideas – that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market" (Peters 2004: 71). However, as John Durham Peters points out, this is not literally speaking the doctrine and slogan of a free marketplace of ideas.

Peters (2004) traces the first uses of the phrase "free marketplace of ideas" to the pages of *The New York Times* in the routine political discourse of the 1930s, but a more profound occurrence before the 1948 Congressional election campaign comes from an unusual quarter: the communist party of the United States, which wanted to campaign "in a free marketplace of ideas". Obviously, American leftists employed the slogan as a defense against rising anticommunism. However, Peters (2004) shows that the Cold War context soon turned around the political sponsorship of the slogan and that, already in 1953, *The New York Times* uses it as an argument against the East European countries that had censorship to prevent the emergence of a free marketplace of ideas.

In addition to this Cold War context, the free marketplace doctrine should also be seen as a politically appropriate response to the development of media structures in late capitalism. Because the commercialized and concentrated media market no longer guaranteed genuine competition of ideas, as done in the early modern era with several competing newspapers in a town, the monopolized media declared themselves a virtual marketplace of ideas.

It was in this intellectual and political climate that the doctrine of free marketplace of ideas, with the principle of self-correcting truth, became ingrained in the libertarian theory of the *Four Theories of the Press*. Accordingly, it is correct to say, as suggested by Nerone (1995), that this theoretical construct is built on an ideological ground of a later day and has little in common with the legacy of original liberalism. Admittedly, this myth also has been discovered by other experts of the history of liberalism (e.g., Pole 2000). However, given its popularity among professional journalists and media proprietors, it needs to be constantly exposed.

Freedom in Perspective

Consequently, we can trace a centuries-long historical line from the early modern age to the postmodern world, with a surprisingly coherent idea of freedom of information. In this context, liberalism is not a partisan ideology hijacked by U.S. diplomacy but a balanced philosophy that is far from outdated. In media philosophies, the original liberal tradition stands closer

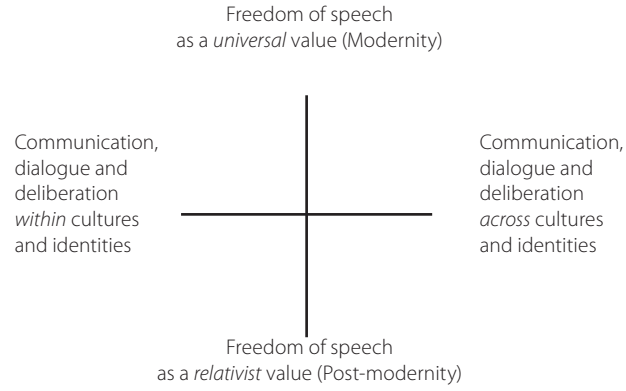
to what was advocated by the Hutchins Commission in the 1940s than to the manifestos of the World Press Freedom Committee[10] in the 1970-80s.

It is instructive to view the paradigm of freedom against the philosophical traditions that can be traced behind the notion of power. In short, there are two fundamentally different notions of power: a Hobbesian view and a Hegelian view. The first of these traditions follows Thomas Hobbes and the Galilean metaphor of a universe of freely moving objects, including human beings and their will – free meaning absence of external impediments of motion. In this tradition, power means intervention against free movement – power is the capacity to block free movement. The latter tradition, for its part, follows the Kantian philosophy, whereby human beings are determined not only by the laws of nature but also by moral reasoning. Marxism later shared more or less the same philosophy. In this tradition, freedom means autonomy from nature and is based on the rational and moral capacity of human beings; freedom "is not the ability to act according to one's will and interest without being intervened, but rather is almost exactly the opposite – it is the placing of natural desires and interests in a position in which they are governed by moral judgments" (Pulkkinen 2000: 12).

The Hobbes–Galilean tradition defines politics as a game between atomistic individuals, whereas the Hegelian–Marxist tradition understands politics as an organic part of a society, where power is not the relation between two individuals but "an instrument of justice in the process of the self-control of society" (Pulkkinen 2000: 94). The former "libertarian" tradition introduces an ontology, where power appears as a fairly simple (negative) element, with freedom as its (positive) opposition. The latter, "communitarian tradition", for its part, has an ontology, where power is not an obstacle distracting natural movement but an essential instrument to ensure morality and order in civil society and ultimately in the state. In this tradition, power and freedom are far from simple and mechanistic notions, and therefore this tradition is intellectually more demanding and challenging than the standard libertarian version.

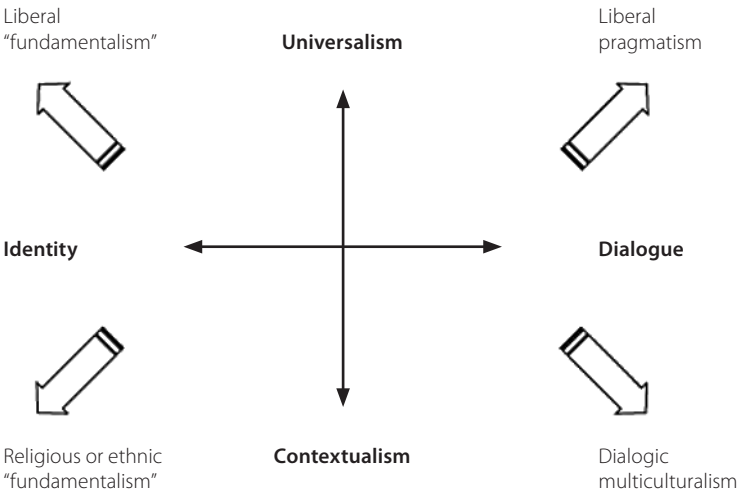
A textbook case for deconstructing the notion of media freedom is provided by the worldwide debate that followed after the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, published provocative caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed in fall 2005. An international study compiled 14 national reviews of the way freedom of speech was understood in the political and professional debates on the cartoon controversy (Kunelius et al. 2007; Kunelius & Alhassan 2008). After empirically examining the free speech rhetoric in a number of media in these countries the study introduces a framework with two underlying dimensions of the debate as shown in Figure 1. One dimension defines the notion of freedom of speech, ranging from a universal value of absolutist freedom to a culture-specific value of relativist freedom. The other dimension defines the nature of communication, ranging from a national sphere where dialogue

Figure 1. Basic Dimensions Behind Freedom Discourses



Source: Kunelius et al. 2007: 17.

Figure 2. Four Extreme Positions in Terms on Freedom of Speech



Source: Kunelius and Alhassan 2008: 90.

and deliberation take place within cultures and identities to a global sphere where dialogue and deliberation take place across cultures and identities. Seen against these dimensions, four extreme positions are distinguished as shown in Figure 2.

Those Islamists who attacked the media and countries where the caricatures were published naturally held a relativist view of press freedom and were placed in the national/culture-centered end of the communication dimension, without respect for a global dialogue between cultures. However, those Western press freedom advocates, who insisted that publishing of the cartoons can under no circumstances be denied on grounds of principle, were typically found in the same end of the communication dimension with the Islamists, placing themselves beyond reflection and thus turning against the idea of liberty as an open and tolerant approach. Thus, there are "fundamentalists" among both liberal and religious camps. For the freedom advocates, this is a bitter lesson that has not proceeded well in the site of the study – rather, the extreme libertarians in Finland have chosen a defensive strategy by accusing the study of condoning censorship.

Yet, the lesson must go on as freedom applied to media is a notoriously problematic concept. Moreover, it is a deceptively ideological concept – especially when understood to be simple and apolitical. We must therefore be alert and critical in order to avoid ideological traps – and complacency fed by top rankings in international comparisons. After all, we are always bound to a certain tradition, and our thinking with all its concepts and paradigms is constructed rather than inherently given.

On the other hand, a critical approach to the topic does not suggest that the idea of freedom – in general or applied to media – should be undermined or suspected. On the contrary, freedom of thought, expression, and media is cherished as a vital element in the lives of individuals as well as societies. It is precisely because of its great value that freedom should not be allowed to degenerate into an ideological instrument, as has too often been the case. To disprove the old myths and avoid the emergence of new ones, it is important that freedom, and the lack of it, remain under constant debate.

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Notes

1 Adapted from Nordenstreng, K. (2010) 'Liberating freedom from libertarian myths', pp. 207-218 in R. Fortner and M. Fackler (eds.) *Ethics & Evil in the Public Sphere. Media, Universal Values & Global Development. Essays in Honor of Clifford G. Christians.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. With permission from Hampton Press. Earlier version: Nordenstreng 2007. See also: Nordenstreng 2011.

2 http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-press For a comprehensive report of their Freedom of the Press 2012, see Deutsch Karlekar & Dunham 2012.

3 http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013,1054.html

4 This point was examined by Mäntylä 2007 (Finnish doctoral dissertation supervised by the present author).

5 http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm (paragraph 25, last bullet).

6 http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/

7 http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/about-us/ (Accessed in August 2013)

8 http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/history/constitution/

9 http://www.unesco.org/

10 http://www.wpfc.org/index.php?q=node/10

Freedom of Expression Revisited

Citizenship and Journalism in the Digital Era

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NORDICOM

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A Brief Introduction

In recent years there has been widespread concern about the ability of the media to maintain and develop their role as a pillar of democracy. A precondition for true democracy is well-informed citizens and the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information, and that can only exist where the press and internet are free and pluralism and independence of media are secure.

Internet and the ongoing digitization have transformed media landscapes and in turn the social functions of media and the structure of both governance and markets as new kinds of transnational companies have emerged. Issues regarding freedom of expression, freedom of information and freedom of the press are more complex than ever.

Examples of new forms of political censorship, monitoring and control, gatekeeping, disinformation, terrorism laws, threats to journalists and other, as well as commercially motivated hindrances to these freedoms are, unfortunately, commonplace. Freedom of expression, privacy and security are closely interrelated.

Traditional media and their various platforms on the Internet and mobile telephony operate today in contexts that are quite different from those that prevailed when most of the fundamental declarations and resolutions regarding media and human rights were adopted on the global arena: *The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, The UNESCO Constitution of 1946, the Universal Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966,* and *UNESCO's Resolution 29: Condemnation of Violence against Journalists of 1997.*

Despite the passage of time, these documents continue to express the principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, with an emphasis on pluralism and independence of the media – both offline and online. The principles of freedom of expression and press freedom must be technology-neutral.

Advances in technology and changes in the political and social context in which the digital technologies operate give rise, however, to a number of dilemmas, and these in turn demand new approaches and strategies to ensure the full and proper application of these fundamental freedoms. A number of challenges have to be taken into account if we are to succeed in resolving complex issues of freedom of expression, not least those involving freedom of the press, in ways that prevent the erosion of these freedoms and, ultimately, the erosion of human rights.

The communication society of today has an enormous potential to add to and advance democracy, human rights and social justice – not least globally.

We gain access to information and knowledge that not so many years ago were beyond our horizons, and we can make our voices heard in numerous possible ways.

There are, however, some powerful constraints. In order to be able to make use of these freedoms, citizens have to have some education and be of good health. Thus, many groups of people living in poverty are unable to use their rights. They often face social inequality, poor schools, gender discrimination, unemployment and inadequate health systems. People caught up in war and violent unrest are especially vulnerable. Millions of people have been driven from their homes and have no civil rights whatsoever.

Many of the researchers who have devoted themselves to problems of development and political legitimacy, and what can be done to eradicate poverty and corruption – two prime "enemies" to these fundamental rights – are agreed as to the need for "clean government" with a concern for human welfare. They focus not only on formal political institutions, but also on informal institutions having to do with trust and traditions of cooperation. These, too, must be taken into consideration.

In many societies some people fear that globalization poses a mortal threat to their society's and culture's uniqueness and see media as agents of a globalized cultural sphere. The fearful take measures to defend their identities, and when common cultural platforms can no longer be maintained, stockades are raised around local cultures, religious beliefs and communities. Thus, while horizons broaden, the world also seems to retreat further from us.

Transcendence of boundaries and defense of boundaries are twin aspects of the globalization process. Globalization processes force us not only to focus more on transnational phenomena in general, but also to highlight difference. Thus, globalization calls for regional epistemologies.

The Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – are kindred in many respects, including their media systems. All share long traditions of protecting freedom of expression and freedom of the press in constitutional law; public service broadcasting; state subsidy systems to insure pluralism in the press; early development of ICT; and not least a long tradition of mass literacy.

The Nordic countries also rate high on indexes of democracy, welfare, absence of corruption and other such indicators – characteristics that, taken together, are often referred to as "the Nordic model". In this era of globalization, however, the Nordic countries are undergoing change on many fronts. Extensive deregulation has changed the relationship between government, the market and the citizens. Furthermore, once homogeneous populations are today truly multicultural. From the point of view of welfare politics and democratic processes, these changes pose numerous challenges.

The Nordic region is among the most technology-intensive and "wired" regions in the world. People in these countries have enormous possibilities to exchange information and to make their voices heard, which bodes well for the future of democracy. But, there is also a risk in the form of widening gaps in our societies in terms of knowledge. Media use in the Nordic countries has become increasingly fragmented, differentiated and individualized. The conditions under which media operate have changed, and so, too, the "public sphere", so essential to democracy. Critical, independent journalism is now an endangered species.

Nonetheless, all too often public discussions of the media are concerned more with business models than with safeguarding professional journalism – ultimately it is about the press freedom and freedom of expression upon which it rests. And all too often the 'top-down' perspective of politics and the industry collides with the 'bottom-up' perspective of the network culture.

This situation has far-reaching implications for the research community. There is an urgent need to broaden the context in which freedom of expression, freedom of information and press freedom are conceptualized. A much more holistic approach is called for if progress is to be made. As researchers we need to revive our curiosity and explore the new phenomena in society around us.

In 2009 Nordicom published *Freedom of Speech Abridged? Cultural, Legal and Philosophical Challenges,* an anthology that focused on the traditional concept of individual freedom of expression. A media perspective was a key element in most of the articles. The book was edited by two Norwegian researchers, Anine Kierulf and Helge Rønning, and the essays presented were written by researchers and authors working in the Nordic countries. More than four years later, we see that this book has reached large numbers of readers around the world.

The present volume, *Freedom of Expression Revisited. Citizenship and Journalism in the Digital Era,* may be seen as a follow-up to this earlier title. The articles in it arise out of collaboration among Nordic scholars around among other things an international symposium held in conjunction with the Hanasaari International Freedom of Expression Days in Finland in December 2012.

The theme of this symposium might be summarized as critical perspectives on Nordic experiences and conceptions of freedom of expression and the media, formulated in the question: Do the Nordic countries have anything to contribute to global discussions of freedom of expression, press freedom and the role of journalists in contemporary communication societies?

From Nordicom's view it is most important to understand the principle of freedom of expression and communication rights from different standpoints in various parts of the world. This is an absolute prerequisite to any robust scientific inquiry into the field on a global scale.

There is a need for a more coherent, comprehensive understanding – a call for greater internationalization of media studies. We need more collaboration – within our field, with other disciplines, with society around us and across national frontiers. We need to learn more from one another, to share knowledge and context. We have to maintain and further develop national and regional collaboration, not least as a means to ensure that internationalization does not take place at the expense of knowledge about, and reflection on, scholars' own societies and cultures.

Fruitful national and regional dialogues are a great boon in international exchanges, and vice versa. It is therefore my hope that this book may contribute knowledge and reflections of value to the discussion of freedom of expression and press freedom.

Finally, I should like to thank all those who have contributed the fruits of their research and their reflections on the complex and often controversial issues relating to freedom of expression, citizenship and the role of journalism in digital cultures.

Göteborg in August 2013

Ulla Carlsson